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"Cinderella Was a Wuss": A Young Girl's Responses to Feminist and Patriarchal Folktales

In this longitudinal study we examine a young girl's responses to "feminist" and "patriarchal" folktales. Data were collected during five informal interviews with the participant at 8 and at 12 years of age and were analyzed according to grounded theory methodologies. Particularly salient issues raised by tales at both stages had to do with the exercise of personal agency, physical strength on the part of males and females, and the symbolic significance of dress. Findings challenge psychological theories about the appeal of folktales to young children, provide insight into developmental issues in young girls' response to narrative, raise questions about how young girls negotiate cultural scripts in a patriarchal world, and highlight the importance of disrupting the layering of polarized gender norms and ideals through alternative narratives.

KEY WORDS: folktales; gender; feminist theory; reader response; children's literature.

A Little Pretty
POCKET-BOOK
Intended for the
Instruction and Amusement
of
Little Master TOMMY
and
Pretty Miss POLLY.
With Two Letters from
JACK the Giant-Killer;
AS ALSO
A Ball and Pincushion;
The Use of which will infallibly make *Tommy*
a good Boy, and *Polly* a good Girl.

From the earliest days of literature produced for children, adults have recognized that stories potentially have a powerful effect on children's self-understanding and behavior. Indeed, from the days when

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A Little Pretty Pocket-Book

monks copied children's lesson books by hand, through the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century, and into the early 20th century, didacticism marked children's literature. Published in England in 1744, *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* represented a new direction in the world of children's books in that it was intended to entertain as well as to instruct. The overall purpose however, is clear: "To make Tommy a good Boy, and Polly a good Girl." The accompanying ball (for little boys) and pincushion (for little girls) reflect the perceived difference in interest between boys and girls; that there were also different perceptions of what exactly it meant for Tommy to become a "good boy" and Polly to become a "good girl" was not an issue that would be raised until much later.

Dégh, "Oral folklore: folk narrative"

The particular effect that traditional folktales or fairy tales have on children has been a topic of interest and concern at least since the publication of the Grimm Brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* in the 19th century. According to folklorist Linda Dégh (1965), the Grimms were compelled to consider the suitability of various of their *hausmärchen* for children when the popularity of the tales began to extend from scholars and linguists—their primary intended audience—to children. The Grimms assumed that the tales would give children pleasure and delight; but, along with other adults of the times, the Grimms thought that the frightful elements in the tales would also be useful in disciplining children.

C. P. Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*

J. Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*

In the 20th century, the influence of fairy tales on children was explored from many perspectives: psychological (Bettelheim, 1977; Estes, 1992; Favat, 1977; Jung, 1959; von Franz, 1980); literary (Auden, 1943; Lewis, 1966; Tolkien, 1965); folkloristic (Dégh, 1965; Stone, 1985); and sociopolitical (Zipes, 1983, 1985, 1986). With the exception of Estes and Zipes, those who have approached the tales from these perspectives have not interpreted them as conveying particular gendered meaning. Estes' concern is the recovery of the wild woman archetype for women whose free, instinctual, and passionate natures have been "tamed" by a repressive society. Zipes focuses his concern on children. According to Zipes (1983), "educated writers [of the 17th through the 19th centuries] purposely appropriated the oral folktale and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social order of that time" (p. 3). The tales have undergone successive stages of patriarchalization, Zipes says, during which active young heroines were changed to active heroes and matrilineal family ties and relationships became patrilineal. Thus the stories that have come down to children in recent times are stamped by a patriarchal world view.

Others have also expressed concern about the collective weak, silent, and passive females who populate the stories of the Western European canon, females whose chief virtues lie in their physical beauty, their silence, their docility, and their dependence on a stronger male figure to rescue them from a predicament from which they cannot extricate themselves (Bottigheimer, 1986; Davies, 1989; Lieberman, 1972; Phelps, 1978; Stone, 1975, 1981, 1989; Yolen, 1982). In these tales, to use Gilbert's (1994) term, a "hierarchical dualism" between masculinity and femininity is reinforced by the juxtaposition of such females with powerful, active, and effective male characters who emerge as the heroes, the rescuers, the saviors of otherwise powerless women (p. 127).

P. Gilbert, "And they lived happily ever after: cultural storylines and the construction of gender"

This concern led a number of feminist scholars to search through old folktale anthologies to discover whether among the old tales there were not also stories that featured strong, resourceful, independent, and active females, females whose physical appearance is incidental, females who are quite capable of solving their own (and others') problems in the world. Indeed such tales, neglected or overlooked in a patriarchal culture, were discovered—and recovered. A number of anthologies of these "feminist" tales have been published with the hope that children would find in those tales female role models with whom it is healthier, and more liberating, for little girls to identify (Barchers, 1990; Carter, 1990; Lurie, 1980; Minard, 1975; Phelps, 1978, 1981).

Stories alone do not determine children's perceptions of gender, of course; they are only a part of the complex of societal influences, including television, movies, advertisements, magazines, and popular music, that together send strong messages of gender norms and ideals. Yet, within this complex, stories have a powerful and often subtle effect. As Gilbert (1992) writes:

> By entering into story worlds, and by being inserted into the storylines of their culture, students come to know what counts as being a woman, or being a man, in the culture to which the stories belong. They come to know the range of cultural possibilities available for femininity and masculinity—and the limits to that range. . . . Through constant repetition and layering, story patterns and logic become almost "naturalized" as truths and common sense. (pp. 127–128)

A. M. Trousdale, "The telling of the tale: children's responses to fairy tales presented orally and through the medium of film."

Earlier research in children's responses to traditional tales from the patriarchal tradition indicates that adults are often mistaken when they presume to predict how children respond to traditional folktales; more fruitful than armchair theorizing is asking children themselves what meanings the tales hold for them (Trousdale, 1987, 1989). What,

we wondered, would children's responses be to these more recently recovered "feminist" tales whose protagonists do not conform to patriarchal expectations for females but who counter them, resist them, fly in the face of them? What would their responses to these girls and women reveal about their own constructions of gender, about any tensions or conflicts that they themselves experience in negotiating their roles as females in the world?

A. M. Trousdale, "Let the children tell us: the meanings of fairy tales for children."

Ann conducted the initial research, Sally helping with the later data analysis. Qualitative methodologies guided the overall design of the study, including participant selection and collection and analysis of data.

The Stories

Ann read numerous tales from feminist folktale collections and selected three that raised particularly relevant issues. The tales were "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen," and "Three Strong Women," all of which came from anthologies edited by Ethel Johnston Phelps (1978, 1981). We also used one "patriarchal" tale, Grimm's "Briar Rose" (*The Complete Fairy Tales,* 1987) for the purpose of contrast and to highlight any differences in response to feminist or patriarchal heroines.

"Tatterhood"

E. J. Phelps, "Tatterhood"

A queen gives birth to twin girls. The first is born with a wooden spoon in her hand, riding a goat, and crying, "Mama!" The second is born fair and sweet. The first twin grows into a little hoyden, always riding about on her goat, dressed in ragged clothes and a ragged hood. This is Tatterhood. Her sister, who is more demure and who dresses cleanly and properly, is much more acceptable to the queen.

One day a pack of trolls invades the castle. Tatterhood tries to drive them away but is successful only after a troll whips off Tatterhood's sister's head, replacing it with a calf's head. Tatterhood resolves to recover her sister's head. She declines the offer of a crew and sets off on a ship with her sister to the land of the trolls. She retrieves her sister's head from the angry trolls, and the two girls decide to travel on a bit to see something of the world. When they reach the shore of another kingdom, a prince rides down to see who has arrived. He immediately falls in love with Tatterhood's sister and wants to marry her, but the sister says she will not marry until Tatterhood marries. The prince rides away wondering who would marry such an odd-looking creature, but he returns with his younger brother to invite the two girls to a feast. Tatterhood, refusing her sister's pleas to clean her face and put on one of her own dresses, rides to the castle alongside

the younger prince. The prince asks her why she rides a goat, and she replies, "I can ride on a horse if I choose." Immediately the goat is changed into a fine steed. A similar pattern follows with her ragged cloak, which changes into a circlet of gold and pearls, and her spoon, which changes into a rowan wand. Tatterhood asks the prince if he would like to see her face beneath the streaks of soot and he replies, "That too shall be as you choose." Tatterhood does cause the soot to disappear, and the story ends on the note that the feasting lasted for many days, but that we will never know whether Tatterhood was lovely or plain because it "didn't matter in the least" to Tatterhood or the prince. There is no explicit mention of marriage.

"The Twelve Huntsmen"

E. J. Phelps, "The twelve huntsmen"

Katrine is the only child of a nobleman. She likes to ride out to hunt with her father and has no interest in the many suitors who seek her hand. However, one day a young prince, Wilhelm, comes to the castle, and he and Katrine fall in love. He asks Katrine to marry him and gives her his ring. A messenger arrives from Wilhelm's father, saying that his father is ill and requests Wilhelm to return home. Wilhelm promises to return as soon as he can.

Wilhelm's dying father asks him to marry a princess from a neighboring kingdom. Wilhelm tries to tell his father he is betrothed to another, but in his grief agrees to do as his father wishes. Acting on the advice of a wise lion, Wilhelm delays the marriage. When months pass without Wilhelm's return, Katrine decides to go find out what has caused his delay. She and eleven friends learn the ways of huntsmen, cut their hair, and, dressed as huntsmen, set off to Wilhelm's kingdom. Wilhelm does not recognize Katrine and takes the huntsmen into his service. Katrine learns that Wilhelm is engaged to the princess, but is persuaded to stay until she learns whether Wilhelm really prefers another.

One day Wilhelm, in a state of despair over this proposed marriage, jumps on his horse and gallops recklessly away. Katrine follows and comes upon Wilhelm in the woods, injured in a fall from his horse. She dismounts to help him and Wilhelm, seeing his ring on her finger, recognizes her. They seek the advice of the lion, who tells Wilhelm that his prior betrothal to Katrine releases him from his promise to his father. Their wedding takes place soon after.

"Three Strong Women"

E. J. Phelps, "Three strong women"

In "Three Strong Women," a Japanese tall tale, the great wrestler Forever-Mountain is on his way to wrestle before the emperor. Strutting

along proud of his great strength, he sees a young girl carrying a bucket of water on the road in front of him. Thinking to have some amusement, he comes up behind the girl and tickles her. She brings her arm down and catches Forever-Mountain's hand between her arm and body. To his surprise, he cannot pull his hand away. Over his protests, she drags him along and persuades him to come to her mother's house, where they will make a really strong man of him.

When they arrive, Maru-me's mother returns from the field, carrying a cow on her back. She then picks up a large oak tree and throws it end over end to the next mountainside. Forever-Mountain quietly faints.

The three women put Forever-Mountain through a regimen of hard work. Every evening he wrestles with the grandmother, for Maru-me or her mother might accidentally hurt him if they wrestled with him. He grows stronger, and finally, when Forever-Mountain is able to pin the grandmother for half a minute, they decide he is ready to go to the wrestling match. Before he leaves, Forever-Mountain asks for Maru-me's hand in marriage, promising to return to be a part of the family.

Forever-Mountain, unusually quiet, does not participate in the boasting of the other wrestlers. In the first match, simply by stamping his foot he sends his opponent bouncing into the air and out of the ring like a soap bubble. Forever-Mountain mildly picks up the next challengers and deposits them outside the ring. The emperor proclaims him the winner and gives him the all the prize money, but tells him never to wrestle in public again. Forever-Mountain declares that he will become a farmer. He returns to the mountain where Maru-me is waiting for him. The story concludes with the note that up in the mountains when the earth shakes and rumbles, the people say it is Forever-Mountain and Maru-me's grandmother practicing their wrestling.

"Brier Rose"

The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm

"Brier Rose" is the Grimm Brothers' variant of "Sleeping Beauty." In this "patriarchal" tale, a queen gives birth to a long-awaited child who is so beautiful that the king decides to hold a feast. He wants to invite the "wise women" of the kingdom to the feast, but there are 13 wise women and only 12 golden plates from which they can be served, and so one is not invited. At the feast the wise women bestow such gifts as virtue, beauty, and wealth on the young princess. When the thirteenth wise woman enters the hall, angry at not having been invited to the feast, she utters a spell that on her fifteenth birthday the princess will prick herself with a spindle and die. One wise woman

who had been invited has not made her wish, and although she cannot undo the spell, she can soften it to a spell of sleep for 100 years.

On her fifteenth birthday the princess comes across an old woman spinning flax. The princess touches the spindle, pricks her finger, and falls into a deep sleep. The spell spreads throughout the entire palace, which is soon covered by a brier hedge. From time to time princes try to break through the hedge, but they are caught and, unable to get loose, die miserable deaths. After many years have gone by, another prince comes to the country and hears the story of the sleeping princess from an old man. Despite the old man's warning, the prince determines to make his way through the hedge. The hundred years have just ended, and the hedge opens before the prince and lets him through. He makes his way to the tower, finds Brier Rose, and kisses her awake. Everyone else in the castle awakens as well. The story ends with the marriage of Brier Rose and the prince.

Nikki, the Participant

We interviewed Nikki at two stages of her life, at eight years of age and four years later. She was initially chosen by criterion-based selection (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), in accordance with research in children's responses to literature and, particularly, to fairy tales. Favat's (1977) investigations revealed that children's interest in fairy tales peaks between the ages of six and eight. Working from a Piagetian perspective, Favat notes unique correspondences between characteristics of the young child and characteristics of fairy tales, including animism and a belief in magic, a morality of constraint, an expression of causality by juxtaposition of events, and the egocentrism of the child and the centrality of the fairy tale hero or heroine in the world of the tale. According to Favat, children's interest in fairy tales typically declines after the age of eight, when they begin to seek more realistic reading matter.

J. P. Goetz and M. D. LeCompte, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*

F. A. Favat, *Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest*

Applebee (1978) has found that children who have not yet entered concrete operations lack the ability to express responses to narrative beyond a simple retelling of the story, but begin to be able to organize and synthesize responses as they enter concrete operations. We wanted a participant at the upper edge of the six-to-eight age range to maximize her interest in fairy tales as well as to maximize her potential in responding beyond a simple retelling of the story.

A. Applebee, *A Child's Concept of Story: Ages Two to Seventeen*

Ann met Nikki at church and knew her only slightly when the study began. She comes from a literate, white middle-class background. Her parents divorced when Nikki was three, and the mother had custody of Nikki and her sister, who is three years Nikki's senior. Nikki's

mother taught piano at home. Her father was completing an advanced degree in theatre at a local university.

At eight years of age, Nikki freely described herself as a tomboy. She wore her dark curly hair cut short and showed up at the sessions dressed in shorts or pants, high-top tennis shoes, and, often, a baseball cap with its brim turned up at the front or pulled around to the rear. She expressed a strong dislike for ruffles and for the colors pink and purple, saying that she refused to wear them. Nikki was not at all interested in dolls, preferring to play team sports.

Nikki was an avid reader. She had recently finished reading all the Laura Ingalls Wilder books and spoke of a family trip to the Wilder homesite. Nikki's parents had read to her when she was younger, but had not included fairy tales in her early reading. Her knowledge of fairy tales had come primarily from movies, television, and, particularly, seeing fairy tales dramatized in the local amateur children's theatre.

When Ann discussed Nikki's tomboyism with her mother, she confirmed that Nikki would scrutinize clothing, refusing to wear "anything with the hint of a ruffle on it. She could see ruffles we couldn't see." She said that Nikki had been through a period of not wanting to be a girl at all and that she had developed "negative connotations about girls." According to her mother, a neighborhood boy had teased Nikki about being a girl. When her mother saw the effect of this teasing on Nikki she ended the relationship between the children, but she said that from that time, Nikki had refused to wear girlish clothes. She had tried to reassure Nikki that it was okay to be a tomboy, that she herself had been a tomboy, and "that girls can do girl things *and* boy things too," in order to "give her a little bit more permission to return to some of the feminine qualities. She does have a nurturing side."

Nikki's mother said that she and her former husband had not given the children "any messages about being a passive female," but that she had raised her daughters to "be resourceful, to develop their abilities, and to be independent," qualities she saw as neither masculine nor feminine. Living in a single-parent home, the girls shared the household responsibilities with their mother.

In the years between the first and second phases of the study, Nikki and her family moved to another state but returned when Nikki was 12. Ann thought it would be interesting to discover how Nikki, now approaching adolescence, would respond to the same stories at this stage in her development.

At 12, Nikki displayed an interest in acting as a career and in doing television modeling. She had developed a flair for style, now expressing a preference for baggy jeans and overalls worn with a tee shirt and platform tennis shoes. She said that she liked shopping at the Gap, where she could shop for pants without going to a boys department. She volunteered that she had also purchased her first dress, a simple, tailored above-the-knee shift. She explained: "You'll see it in all the magazines. A girl's interest in clothes will change when she begins to notice *boys*!" She was resistant to wearing makeup, however, even though people were "pestering" her about wearing it. "People say, 'You'll become interested in makeup when you begin to notice boys.' I want to say to them, 'I'm almost thirteen years *old*—you don't think I've noticed *boys*?' "

For the most part, Nikki did not clearly remember the feminist stories from four years before, recalling only, several paragraphs into "The Twelve Huntsmen," that Katrine had gone off on a horse somewhere. She did retain a sense of "Brier Rose," a story she had been familiar with from other media and exposure.

The procedures were the same when Nikki was 8 and when she was 12. At both ages Ann met with her five times, in sessions a week apart. The sessions were kept as informal as possible, in Ann's living room where Nikki sat on a sofa and Ann on a chair next to it. The tape recorder was placed on a table between them. At the first session, Ann explained the procedures and assured Nikki that there were no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that she would be asking, that she wanted to find out what she really thought about the stories. She also encouraged Nikki to ask any questions or say anything she might want to say about the stories as they went along.

During the reading of the stories, Ann paused at several places to discuss the story "so far," to tap into ongoing responses. At the end of the reading she asked further open-ended questions. She then asked Nikki to retell the story. The following week, Ann began by asking her to retell the story from the week before, then proceeded with the next story. At the final session, she asked Nikki to retell the last story and then asked summative questions about the stories and story characters.

Ann took field notes, and at the end of the sessions with Nikki she interviewed Nikki's mother. The data were analyzed according to grounded theory methodologies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When we analyzed the data from the two sets of interviews, several major themes emerged: issues involving personal agency, physical strength, tensions between autonomy and responsibility, and the symbolic and

practical significance of dress. We also noted evidence of developmental difference in Nikki's response.

Findings

Developmental Differences

At eight years of age, Nikki seemed to accept the magical elements in the tales without question, in accordance with Favat's (1977) claims about correspondences between young children and fairy tales. By 12 years of age, she had clearly grown beyond belief in magic and took an ironical, almost sarcastic, stance toward the now "unrealistic" elements. For example, Nikki interrupted the reading of "Tatterhood" at the description of Tatterhood's birth. "On a *goat*?" she exclaimed. "She'd have to be big when she was pregnant!" When Ann continued reading, describing the birth of Tatterhood's sister, Nikki laughed. "Was *she* born on a *duck*?"

Similarly, in reading "Brier Rose" when the 100-year-spell was cast, Nikki commented, "She would be, like, 115 years old. 'Thanks to this new aging process, I still look like a 15-year-old.' " Later, when the spell broke, Nikki asked, "Wouldn't you just, while you're sleeping, die of starvation anyway? And I mean everything would just rot. 'All you have is green meat in here!' "

Nikki's responses, however, challenge Favat on one level—his claim for a coincidence of the young child's egocentricity with the centrality of the protagonist in the fairy tale world. Even at eight years of age, Nikki's idea of the story world was not focused exclusively on the protagonist. She demonstrated a notable tendency toward inclusiveness and a concern for secondary characters, an ethic of caring that will be discussed in a later section.

What fairy tales were primarily about changed for Nikki. At eight, she described them as characterized by "fighting or sometimes singing. Women and men mixed together, and there's usually princes and princesses. Sometimes a love story at the end." She identified "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen," and "Brier Rose" as fairy tales because they "had princes and princesses in them"; adding that "Tatterhood" also "has a kingdom, a king and queen. I'm used to having fairy tales with kings, queens, prince and princess." She would not call "Three Strong Women" a fairy tale, she said, "because I've never heard a fairy tale with a wrestler in it or strong people." Instead, fairy tales "have people that are dainty, and princesses. People that dress up a lot."

By age 12 her definition of fairy tales had changed. "I think of them as more of the love stories," she said. She identified "Tatterhood, "The Twelve Huntsmen," and "Brier Rose" as fairy tales "because they got married at the end" or "because there's love in it." Now she found Katrine's lack of interest in marrying before Wilhelm arrives "unrealistic."

Again, she would not classify "Three Strong Women" as a fairy tale, but for different reasons. Even though Maru-Me and Forever-Mountain do marry at the end, their romance is not the primary concern of this rather ironic tale that turns ordinary perceptions of men's and women's relative physical strength on end. At age eight, Nikki had found the fact that the women possessed greater physical strength than Forever-Mountain absolutely believable, but her views on this matter had changed significantly by age 12. Now she was also keenly aware of societal constraints on such "unfeminine" physical activities as wrestling. She found another genre for the story: "This would be more of a Japanese fantasy proper," she concluded.

Personal Agency

S. Brownmiller, *Femininity*

The social and economic dependence of females on males has had a powerful influence in shaping notions of femininity. Over the ages, females have learned to shape their behavior as well as their physical appearance to those expressions that have been likely to gain and retain male approval or desire. Brownmiller (1984) has written that the feminine principle historically has been "a grand collection of compromises, large and small, that [a female] must make in order to render herself a successful woman" (p. 16). Femininity, she says, is "a tradition of imposed limitations" (p. 14), "[a] powerful esthetic that is built upon a recognition of powerlessness" (p. 19). According to Brownmiller,

> The masculine principle is better understood as a driving ethos of superiority designed to inspire straightforward, confident success, while the feminine principle is composed of vulnerability, the need for protection, the formalities of compliance and the avoidance of conflict—in short, an appeal of dependence and good will that gives the masculine principle its romantic validity and its admiring applause. . . . Femininity serves to reassure men that women need them and care about them enormously. (pp. 16–17)

C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*

In the late 19th century, George Eliot wrote of girls' susceptibility to adverse judgments by others, which stems from their lack of power and of their consequent inability "to do something for the world" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 66). Gilligan adds to Eliot's observation the insight, "to the extent that women perceive themselves as having no choice, they correspondingly excuse themselves from the responsibility that

decision entails. Childlike in the vulnerability of their dependency and consequent fear of abandonment, they claim to wish only to please, but in return for their goodness they expect to be loved and cared for" (p. 67). Such notions of femininity are the operative principle on which such patriarchal tales as "Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Sleeping Beauty" rely: beautiful, vulnerable, and dependent, these paragons of traditional femininity seem naturally to be unable to extricate themselves from the situations in which they are caught. Their release is dependent on attracting a stronger and more competent male to rescue them, and their future security is assured in their marriage to this strong, protective male, with whom they will "live happily ever after."

In the three "feminist" tales chosen for this study, the female protagonists prove to be capable of taking responsibility for themselves and their situations, of making decisions and acting on them independently of masculine protection or approval. They depend on neither physical beauty nor female wiles to entice a male to act on their behalf. It was in Nikki's responses to "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen," and "Brier Rose" that this theme was clearest.

Tatterhood's insistence on self-definition, her independence, and her confidence in her ability to act on the world are evident throughout the story—from her ragged clothing and raucous behavior, her attacking the trolls in the castle, to her decision to set out herself to retrieve her sister's head. She resists any efforts to persuade her to act or dress in a more conventionally feminine way until at the end of the story she transforms her clothing and accoutrements to more conventional ones.

In the first set of interviews (when Nikki was eight), Ann asked Nikki, after reading the story, if there were a character in the story that she would say was her favorite character and, several questions later, if there were a character whom she would like to be like. In both cases Nikki resoundingly chose Tatterhood herself (with one qualification): "because she's like me. I'd like to ride a goat or a horse all day, and wear that kind of stuff except change that hat to a normal hat."

Ann asked Nikki if there were anything in the story that had surprised her. Nikki said that she was surprised that Tatterhood "changed all her stuff." Her retellings of the story reveal her struggle to rationalize the changes. In Nikki's version, when the prince asks Tatterhood why she wears such ragged clothes or carries a spoon, she first replies, " 'Cause I want to." The prince asks, "Why don't you ever change it?" Tatterhood responds, "Do you *want* me to change it?" The prince says that that is up to Tatterhood, and she immediately makes the transfor-

mation. After finishing the story, Nikki explained, "She was probably thinking, 'Well, I don't think I should be dressed like this. People want me to change, then, well . . . , and nobody's really votin' for me to *stay* like this, guess I'll just have to change!" Seen in the context of Nikki's appreciation of Tatterhood's unconventional ways earlier in the story, one might wonder whether in Nikki's view, Tatterhood was capitulating to the pressure of societal norms or seeking to please a particular male, making the change she assumed he would like. Or it may be that, in the absence of pressure to conform, Nikki's Tatterhood felt free to relax a defensive stance and still retain her integrity. Whatever her understanding of this shift in Tatterhood's resistance to social norms, Nikki seems to interpret her decision in light of what Gilligan (1982) has described as a central concern of young women, that of making decisions that are inclusive of both the self and others.

In Phelps' retelling of "Tatterhood," there is no mention of a marriage at the end of the story. At the end of Nikki's retellings of the story at age eight, Tatterhood remained a free, independent spirit, with no marriage mentioned. At age 12, however, her retelling did end in marriage—of both sisters to the two princes. At this age, her "set" for fairy tales included "marriages, kissing at the end, and a prince and princess." But when Ann asked her if she thought Tatterhood married the prince because she *had* to or because she *wanted* to, Nikki ducked the issue. "I don't know," she countered. "Why don't you ask her?"

In "The Twelve Huntsmen," Katrine's independence and confidence in her ability to solve her problems was manifested in her setting out to discover the truth about why Wilhelm had not returned to marry her. While Nikki said that she would like to do the kinds of things that Katrine did—cutting her hair, dressing as a man, and going to Wilhelm's kingdom—she did not see these actions as the best solution to the problem at hand: "Yeah, why didn't she just say it was the secret police of Nottingham or of Robin Hood . . . and say, 'You tell us the truth.' " Nikki would have solved the problem in a more straightforward and practical way. At another point in the interview, Nikki said that if she were in Katrine's situation she would have sent a "king's messenger" with a "note and get the answer instead of cutting her hair short, learning all that stuff. It's just wasting time." Or, she added, she could have telephoned.

At age eight, Nikki's response to "Brier Rose" was quite different on many levels from her response to the three "feminist" heroines. She was critical of Brier Rose as a person and resistant to the values she represented. Her resistance to Brier Rose seemed to stem from objections to the way Brier Rose dressed and, in Nikki's mind at least, her

attitudes and behaviors. When Ann asked Nikki to "tell me about Brier Rose," she replied, "She's okay." Ann prompted, "What was she like?" Nikki responded, "She was a little bit greedy, because—and, you know, seemed like she would brag, just going off and show it because of the magic. Would walk in the house doing this" [tossing her head and shrugging her shoulders proudly].

"You think she would show off like that?" Ann asked.

"Yeah. Because she was so proud of her beauty, and her wealth and her other stuff."

When Ann asked Nikki if she "liked" Brier Rose, she said outright, "No." She went on to explain, "Like, you know, everybody thought she was, you know, so beautiful, and at first she had all these jewels, but if they wouldn't have given her all these gifts, she might just have been a bratty little girl." While Brier Rose is described as physically beautiful in the Grimm Brothers text, the text does not explicitly mention any arrogance or pride in her. This was Nikki's own interpretation. The use to which females put any sense of personal power is clearly important to Nikki; she does not admire a character she sees as proud or self-centered, no matter how "beautiful" she may be.

At eight, the character Nikki was drawn to in "Brier Rose" was the prince—precisely because of his sense of personal agency, along with his impulse to help others. When Ann asked her if there was anyone in the story who she would say was her favorite character, she replied, "The last prince." Why? "He is braver than that guy who was trying to convince him not to go through. And he had a mind, to at least try to save the kingdom. When the other princes just gave up right when they got stuck."

Nikki's insistence on a sense of personal agency was quite clear at age 12. During one interview when she and Ann were discussing such patriarchal heroines as Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Rapunzel, Nikki suddenly exclaimed, "Cinderella was a wuss!" How so? "She could have run away, you know. I mean, like she had the weakest spirit. It's like, 'Do something about your life! You're rotting away here!' She's obviously not stupid, you know. Cinderella." How did Cinderella come to be such a wuss? "Her dad probably was. Weak-willed. She had already resolved to live her whole life as a maid in service. So there's no chance. Now *me*, *I'd* fight it. I'd run away. Back in those times, you know, you just grab one of the best horses and everything, and they can't track you down." Like Cinderella, Nikki is surrounded by cultural scripts that depict "feminine" passivity as normative. However, unlike Cinderella who accepts the dictates and ex-

amples of her environment, Nikki sees herself resisting such constraints.

Her impulse to take an active role in solving problems was also clear in her discussion of "The Twelve Huntsmen." She heartily approved of Katrine's riding off to discover why Wilhelm had not returned. "I think it would be fun," she added, going on to improvise a conversation among the young women, trying out various "masculine" voices.

Physical Strength

In these feminist tales, the ability of the heroine to act on the world begins with the self-confidence necessary to make decisions and to act on them; but at issue as well is the actual ability to carry forth those actions, which sometimes involves physical strength or power. According to Bronwyn Davies (1989), women are acculturated to view power as "fundamentally contradictory to the *idea* and the idealization of the idea of being female" (p. 71). In her study of preschool children's responses to literary feminist fairy tales, she noted that the female children resisted positioning themselves as powerful except in the domestic sphere and did not even entertain fantasies of themselves as physically powerful. Nikki, older than the children in Davies' study, absolutely did not follow the pattern Davies found.

B. Davies, *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Pre-school Children and Gender*

The story in which physical strength is the most salient issue is "Three Strong Women," the Japanese tale in which the three women are far superior in physical strength to the male wrestler. In responding to this story at age eight, Nikki seemed to be quite comfortable with the idea of females possessing physical strength, and physical strength greater than males'. She did, however, express some qualifications related to age.

Initially Nikki was surprised by Maru-me's physical strength. The initial description of Maru-me is of a "girl," with small dimpled hands, "a round girl with red cheeks and a nose like a friendly button" (pp. 39–40). When Ann paused in the reading of the story at the point when Maru-me has the wrestler firmly in tow and is pulling him along with her, to ask "Is there anything in the story that surprised you so far?" Nikki nodded her head, then said, "Well, a nice, round little girl and she's really strong and stuff. How can a nice little round, dainty girl be, like, a really strong girl?"

At the other end of the scale was the grandmother, whom Nikki described as "stronger than she should be," adding, "and has too much work." When Ann asked her to explain, she replied, "Well, she just lifts trees out the ground when she should be resting." This recom-

mendation seemed to be related to the grandmother's age rather than to her gender. Nikki was very close to her own grandmother and was quite sure that she herself was the stronger of the two. She mentioned the exercise weights that her grandmother owns, which "are green little plastic-covered two-and-a-half-pound [ones], which are pretty light. I could probably use five-pound ones." Other than considerations of age, however, Nikki had absolutely no question in her mind about the relative strength of males and females. When Ann asked, "Do you think women are as strong as men?" she immediately responded, "yes," and went on to describe a race she had had with a boy in her class:

> Okay, you know those blue chairs that you have in preschool? Those blue tin torn-up things? Two of these. Well, we had those outside in the playground and there is a little field space, about like three of these rooms. It started at the beginning of the playground, you know, where you slide and stuff. . . . We started there and we ran all the way across the playground, all the way across the field, and I won. Carrying chairs on our back. And I was also racing against a boy. That just happened so to brag a lot.

Nikki was quite aware, however, that there are perceptions in the world that males are stronger than females. In the story, when Forever-Mountain arrives at the palace grounds to wrestle, all the other wrestlers are comparing weights and telling stories and are surprised that Forever-Mountain does not take part in the boasting. After reading the story, I asked Nikki if she thought Forever-Mountain had changed. She nodded her head and explained, "Well, 'cause I think that he used to see women as, um, sissies. And I thought that, well, I don't guess they really say it in the book, but I bet that those men are boasting, 'Well, if women played against me, I know I'd win.'" Forever-Mountain, clearly, had learned his lesson about this matter.

At the end of Nikki's second telling of the story, Forever Mountain is "there and the girl's waiting for him and he's a farmer and uh, the wrestler and wife just live there and he wrestles with the grandma till she dies, every evening. While the women are getting stronger and he's still just the same."

Ann asked, "Do you think that's what happened?" and Nikki responded, very seriously, "Well, the women are stronger than *him*."

Nikki said that her favorite character in the story, and the character she would like to be like, was Maru-me, because she was "strong," adding that then "I could beat out Andrew in my class." At the final session, Nikki chose Maru-me as her favorite of all the characters in all the stories, "because she was strong, and, you know, she could help.

It was plain to see she was obviously stronger than this really, really, *really* strong guy."

At 12, Nikki's overall favorite character was not Maru-me but Tatterhood. In contrast with her absolute confidence on the subject of the relative strength of males and females at 8, at 12 she was clearly struggling with conflicting narratives on the subject. In the discussion at the end of "Three Strong Women," Nikki commented, "I liked it a lot, but no woman is allowed to best . . . , to be that strong." Her use of "allowed" implies an understanding of socially constructed boundaries concerning women's manifestation of physical strength. Moments later, however, she reached for another reason, citing another "outside" narrative: "God made it so that women weren't that strong . . . that's like one of the ways he made us different." She seemed to be uncomfortable with this essentialist stance as well, however; later in the interview she qualified this view, saying, "Well, no, I do think that it's realistic that a woman could be a lot stronger than a man, but not that strong."

Not only is it unrealistic for a woman to be that strong, but, at 12, Nikki had come to understand there were other dimensions to the issue. When Ann asked Nikki why she thought the three women did not enter the wrestling match themselves, Nikki explained, "Because they're women and it's unfeminine to wrestle."

"Is it really unfeminine or do people just *think* it's unfeminine?" Ann asked.

"Well, there's a little wrestling move called chest-to-chest," Nikki explained. "Which would kind of hurt. See, one of my old teachers, he was a wrestler; he told us about all this. So it's kinda—it's just really unfeminine."

At the age of 12, Nikki had also expanded her concept of strength to include mental and moral power. Forever-Mountain did not boast in the presence of the other wrestlers, she explained, because "he knew better. Because he had had some good training and everything. You know, he, he had become strong in another way."

An Ethic of Caring: Tensions Between Autonomy and Responsibility

At both ages, Nikki's responses to the characters in the stories revealed a tendency to look beyond the centrality of the protagonist's interests to a concern for other characters. Among the qualities she noted and admired in the characters was their "helpfulness."

Gilligan (1982) writes of females seeing moral actions not in terms of "rights" but in terms of "responsibility," of a female "ethic of nurturance, responsibility, and care" (p. 159). According to Gilligan, girls gain maturity within the context of relationships and an ability to look outside oneself and consider the needs of others. Exerting one's power for solely selfish reasons is seen as uncaring and therefore immoral. Decisions are centered around both the self and the other. This moral sense Gilligan describes as an ethic of caring.

At eight years of age, Nikki was very much drawn to the characters who exhibited physical strength or personal agency. In describing each one, however, she added a layer to their character that went beyond sheer ability to act on the world; in each she also saw an ethic of caring, an ethic of responsibility, or an ability to see beyond one's own needs to consider and act on behalf of the needs of others. When Ann paused during the reading of "Tatterhood" at the point where Tatterhood and her sister start off on the ship to recover the sister's head, Ann asked Nikki what she thought. Nikki responded, "I think the one of the girls that's always riding her goat is more helpful than the one that's always wearing dresses." For Nikki, Tatterhood's independence and resistance to conventionality do not negate an ethic of caring. The passive sister, by implication, is less caring than Tatterhood—or perhaps less able to act on any "caring" she might feel. Her explanation of why Tatterhood "changed all her stuff" at the end of the story is also related to an ethic of caring in its inclusivity of others as well as of herself in making personal decisions.

At eight, Nikki inserted a detail into "The Twelve Huntsmen" that indicated an ethic of caring that extended to living things other than human beings. In the story, Katrine is said simply to like to go hunting with her father. In both her retellings, Nikki emphasized that Katrine went hunting, "but not to kill anything."

A. H. Dyson, *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroon Literacy.*

Much like Nikki, two of the eight-year-old girls in Anne Dyson's (1997, 1998) research involving folk processes and popular culture also exhibited an ethic of caring when excluded from active roles in their classroom's Author's Theater activity. A popular facet of their second grade language arts curriculum, Author's Theater was a time when students could write and then direct stories that were dramatized by their classmates. However, when classroom scripts based on the cartoon superhero team the *X-men* became pervasive, roles for girls dwindled. As Dyson (1998) explains,

A. H. Dyson, "Folk processes and media cultures: reflections on popular for literacy educators."

> The minimal number of female roles was a source of irritation for many girls, especially for Holly and Tina. These two girls saw their exclusion, not as a matter of individual affront ("you never let me play"), but as a matter of collective exclusion ("you never let girls play"). (p. 55)

Rather than focus on their own experiences of injustice, the outspoken Holly and Tina deemed it appropriate to act as a voice for the other—perhaps less vocal—girls in their class as well. Implicit in both their behavior and outlook was an understanding of personal strength that had little to do with dominance and much more to do with inclusiveness and community protection. Reminiscent of Gilligan's (1990) ethic of care, the two second grade girls appeared to make decisions and exercise power based on the needs of both the self and the other.

Nikki's interpretation of personal strength was similar to that practiced by Holly and Tina (Dyson, 1998). Although Nikki was very much drawn to Maru-Me in "Three Strong Women" because of her physical strength, that was not the only quality she admired in her. At the last interview when Nikki was eight, she chose Maru-Me as her favorite of all the characters in all the stories, "because she was strong, and, you know, she could help. It was plain to see that she was obviously stronger than this really, really, *really* strong guy." Nikki did not interpret Maru-Me's superior strength as enabling her to dominate others but to "help."

At the age of 12, Nikki seemed to have extended this understanding of the use of one's physical strength to the change in Forever-Mountain. As she said, Forever-Mountain "had become strong in another way." From Nikki's point of view, Forever-Mountain had matured beyond the level of his peers in that he no longer deemed boasting—or attempts to demean his rivals—as necessary or appropriate. As Nikki explained, "It just wasn't right to him." Nikki seems to exemplify Gilligan's (1982) observations that, for females, exerting one's power for solely selfish reasons is seen as uncaring and therefore immoral; decisions are centered around both the self and the other.

Nikki's assessment of the prince in "Brier Rose" also linked a sense of personal power with a sense of caring or responsibility. In explaining why the prince was her favorite character in the story, Nikki explained, "He was braver than that guy who was trying to convince him not to go through. And he had a mind, to at least try to save the kingdom. When the other princes just gave up right when they got stuck."

This ethic of caring also seemed to extend to the less powerful or marginalized characters in the stories. At age 12, she was quick to point out that "it's always the prince's brother that's the best," but then realized, "If it was the prince's brother, then he would be a prince too." At this age, in hearing the story "Three Strong Women," she expressed dismay at the mother's excluding Forever-Mountain

from household work. "The mother is like, 'No, you watch.' Give the guy a chance, Geez!"

The Symbolic and Practical Significance of Dress

Clothing clearly bore both symbolic and practical weight in Nikki's life. Tatterhood's tomboyish and unpretentious clothing and Katrine's donning of masculine attire strongly appealed to Nikki as an eight-year-old. But it was in her discussion of "Brier Rose" and other traditional tales that her understanding of the symbolic, gendered nature of clothing, and the restrictions inherent in feminine dress, were made clear.

Nikki was resistant to Brier Rose as much because of the kind of clothing she wore as for her personal qualities. When Ann asked Nikki if she would "like to be like Brier Rose," she responded, "No."

"No? Why?"

"I'd have to wear dresses."

Even at eight, Nikki had a sense of the political nature of gendered dress. In discussing what it would be like as a girl to live in a castle, Nikki pointed out that it would be "breaking the law to wear pants. 'Cause they didn't, we didn't have our rights yet. Then they could never wear pants. Not in public. They would have to wear those things where you have to pull real tight on their waists, so it looks like your waist is about this big around. But Laura Ingalls, she had to wear dresses a lot, and she got to do her running and playing. In the summer, because they only had to wear thin skirts. But when hoop skirts got in style, ch-ch-ch [gesturing to create a hoop skirt rising up in front of her], because it is always angling up. And she had to go" [pulls imaginary hoop skirt downwards].

The consequences of wearing such limiting clothing seemed to be linked in Nikki's mind to female vulnerability and helplessness. When Ann asked her, "Do you think—if the prince hadn't come—do you think that girls have to get rescued out of their problems by boys?"

"Yeah," Nikki replied. "Those kind of girls."

"Which kind?" I asked.

"Like prissy," she said, "and always have to have those glorying dresses."

"And those girls tend to have to be rescued?"

"Yeah."

"By boys?

"Yeah."

"And what about you?"

"If I lived in a castle, then I would probably, you know, because how I am, I'd just probably have a dagger nearby."

Nikki clearly resists the trade-off Brownmiller (1984) has noted among females who, recognizing their powerlessness in the world, wish only to please, being loved and cared for in return. Nikki would not succumb to such helplessness. She could imagine herself wielding a dagger, but knew also that wearing pants, symbolic of power permitted only to males, would have been forbidden her. At 8, she was aware of such conflicting expectations and possibilities; at 12 she showed evidence of having had to deal with the subtleties and complexities involved in such a conflict.

As a 12-year-old, Nikki laughed when Ann reminded her of her childhood refusal to wear pink or purple, but when it came to ruffles she was still quite adamant. Her resistance was multilayered: "I still will not wear ruffles. I hate them; they're so gross. They're not elegant! They're just kind of frou-frou. A waste of material." Her initial resistance was expressed at the levels of taste and practicality, yet clothing had retained its symbolic significance. She went on to say, "Why do girls need to wear just a big thing of material around their waist? It doesn't make sense. It's uncomfortable. You can't run in them. I mean, it's just useless."

While still employing her foundational arguments, Nikki also incorporated a strategy of accommodation to strengthen her point. She said that she likes clothing that comes from stores such as the Gap, which are "for girls *and* for boys." Why? "It looks nice." Here Nikki seems to be borrowing from outside narratives (of looking "nice"), while not abandoning her own authentic voice.

At 12 years of age, when retelling the conclusion of "Tatterhood," Nikki refrained from general commentary on the transformation of Tatterhood's clothing, focusing on the transformation of the wooden spoon into a wand. "Why do you need a wand if you're a princess?" Nikki indignantly asked. "You don't need a wand!" Later, in expressing her disappointment at the magic at the end of the story, Nikki said, "Where did those magical powers come from? That was the good

thing about her, that she wasn't like, you know, extraterrestrial." Clearly, for Nikki, Tatterhood was enough of a force in the world on her own strength not to need magical trappings, especially such superfluous female trappings as a magic wand. At 12, Nikki still felt a strong identity with Tatterhood. When Ann asked her if there were anybody in the story she would like to be like, she replied, "I'm already like Tatterhood. We're both very outgoing, sort of spunky, and we're not fake." And, she added, she and Tatterhood both dress like "dudes."

Conclusions

This is a study of one child's responses to four fairy tales and, as such, is not intended to be generalized to a larger population. Focusing on one child's responses, however, has allowed us to examine those responses much more closely than would be possible with a larger group of children and to consider particularly salient issues that those responses raise.

Nikki's responses to the stories challenge psychological theories about the appeal of fairy tales to young children, provide insight into developmental issues in response to traditional stories, raise significant questions about how young women negotiate cultural scripts, and underline a need for an expanded literary canon.

While there were consistencies across the ages in such matters as Nikki's strong identification with the character of Tatterhood, the tales themselves were "about" very different things at age 8 and at 12. At eight, Nikki was not struck by the romantic aspects of fairy tales, but saw them as tales of action and adventure. At 12, fairy tales were primarily stories about romance and marriage. Now she found Katrine's lack of interest in marriage before she met Wilhelm "unrealistic" and assumed that, at the end of her independent adventures, Tatterhood married the prince. At eight, Nikki expressed utter confidence and a joyful attitude about the equality—or superiority—of female physical prowess. By the time she was entering adolescence, her ideas of relative female–male strength revealed a struggle with various outside narratives that place physical prowess in the domain of males, not females: societal restrictions on arenas of female activity, notions of what is "feminine," religious teaching about the way God has created males and females to be. Regardless of their physical strength, and not in conflict with her ethic of caring, at both ages Nikki sought characters to identify with who *did* something, were effective, had agency in the world. The "feminist" fairy tales offered Nikki such female protagonists with whom to identify; in the patriarchal tale the only active, effective character was the prince. At 8, Nikki easily iden-

tified with him; at 12, perhaps increasingly influenced by gender expectations, she did not. Still resistant to the passivity of Brier Rose, she said she found no one in the story with whom to identify. As Lieberman (1972) has pointed out, strong women appear in patriarchal tales, but if they are powerful, they are also physically ugly and evil. For a young child, the message becomes a very conflicted one: to identify with a strong female means, implicitly, identifying with someone who is ugly and evil. To identify with an active character who is also "good," one has to identify with a male, something increasingly proscribed as a girl matures.

M. K. Lieberman, "'Some day my prince will come': female acculturation through the fairy tale."

Nikki's responses challenge dominant psychological theories about children's interest in fairy tales, notably those of Favat (1977) and Bettelheim (1977). Her moving beyond a credulous acceptance of the magical elements in the tales at 8 to a more cynical and ironic stance at 12 confirms, in part, Favat's claims, based on Piaget's developmental theory. Yet her responses also contradict his notion that a part of the unique fit between young children and fairy tales has to do with the egocentrism of the young child and the centrality of the protagonist in the fairy tale world. Bettelheim approaches children's interest in the tales from a Freudian perspective. According to Bettelheim, fairy tales are beneficial to children's psyches, regardless of age, in that they provide a central message that "if one . . . steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious" (p. 8).

B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*

At neither stage did Nikki exhibit interest in the protagonist's dominance or "victory" for its own sake—to the contrary. At age eight she pointed out that the strong and capable characters she admired used their ability to help others, evidencing an expansion in concern beyond the centrality of the protagonist to the needs of other characters. At age 12 she described strength as including inner strength and sufficient self-confidence not to need to lord it over others. Her responses follow much more Gilligan's (1982) observation that girls gain maturity within the context of relationships. For many female adolescents, independence is linked to an ability to look outside oneself and consider the needs of others (p. 79). This was true in Nikki's case even at age eight. Integral to this type of moral and emotional maturity is the idea that exerting one's power for solely selfish reasons is uncaring, and therefore immoral. Decisions are centered around both the self and the other. From Nikki's perspective, in fact, boasting about one's one strength is not a sign of strength, but of weakness. And even at eight, her tomboyism did not extend to an appropriation of such "masculine" power in the world as an impulse toward killing animals. Indeed, an ethic of caring ran through her interviews at both stages of development. Both Favat and Bettelheim

were limited in their insights by the patriarchal canon, of course—and, it appears, by a patriarchal mindset.

At age 12, Nikki still identified strongly with Tatterhood and was eager to explain Tatterhood's thoughts and emotions—with one exception. When Ann asked her why Tatterhood married the prince, Nikki ducked the question: "I don't know. Why don't you ask her?" As other comments suggest, Nikki, on the brink of adolescence, seemed to have observed that her culture's dominant scripts demand a great deal of accommodation from women, including the denial of one's own ability effectively to act on the world and a consequent reliance on others'—notably men's—greater power. Marriage has traditionally been one of women's means of achieving such security. Nikki's assumption that Tatterhood married the prince, along with her avoidance of a discussion of Tatterhood's motivation in doing so, suggests an emerging struggle between societal expectations and alternative life scripts that would allow her to face the world with her own independence and integrity intact.

At both ages Nikki was clearly trying to negotiate her way in a world whose prescriptions for gendered behavior conflicted with her own sense of herself and the roles she would choose in life. At 8 she was remarkably forthcoming and sophisticated about gender constraints, but at 12 had obviously noted "where and when women speak and when they are silent," a characteristic that Carol Gilligan (1990) observed in 11- and 12-year-old girls "at the edge of adolescence" (p. 25). Moving past the authentic frankness of earlier years, according to Gilbert (1994), many young women become increasingly aware that their lived reality is not easily aligned with the "reality" that is propagated by dominant cultural scripts. Moreover, coming of age in a culture that has long equated maturity with separation from others, North American adolescent girls are put in a double bind since, as Stern (1989) and others have explained, they form their identities and even achieve independence within the context of relationships. Unable to achieve supposedly normative psychological maturity (from a Freudian perspective) or to meet accepted feminine social norms, many young women experience a crisis. Confronted by conflicting cultural and self-narratives, girls frequently "go underground" with their thoughts and feelings, which puts them at risk of losing honest relationships with themselves and with others. Brown and Gilligan explain that girls "begin not to know what they once knew, to forget the feelings and thoughts that they once knew, but which they then withdrew to protect" (p. 184).

Carol Gilligan, "Teaching Shakespeare's sister: notes from the underground of female adolescence"

L. Stern, "Conceptions of separation and connection in female adolescents"

L. M. Brown and C. Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads*

Described as a turning point by Gilligan (1990), this crisis of conflicting life narratives can act in potentially positive ways in girls' lives.

Although once forthright girls often become evasive, they also gain keen observational skills, which can equip them to construct their own ways of relating to the world—ways that often enable them to include others without excluding themselves. Authentic voices may then be heard above the din of dominant cultural scripts.

K. S. Evans, "A closer look at literature discussion groups: the influence of gender on student response and discourse"

In her study of fifth graders' literature circles, Evans (1998) noted girls withdrawing into silence and also suggests that such silence may be a positive thing; it can be interpreted as a form of resistance or as a short-term strategy for maintaining self-worth when girls' experiences do not align with what is culturally pervasive. Yet such silence also has its limits; as Evans says, "[W]e are inclined to agree with those who believe that ultimate silence will not prevent females (or any oppressed group) from being the objects of violence or oppression" (p. 112).

In the case of girls with such strong childhood voices as Nikki's, paying attention to how she negotiates such crises can provide valuable insight and understanding. At age eight, Nikki was remarkably astute about the political dimensions of gender roles and expectations. As a preadolescent more keenly aware of social boundaries, Nikki had learned to hide behind outside narratives, re-emerging with her own lived experiences, moments later altering her voice. Interwoven among all of Nikki's struggles with issues of physical strength, personal agency, the politics of clothing, and relating to others in the world, are an awareness of social boundaries and a struggle to construct a "connected" yet authentic life narrative.

Nikki, like many children, has experienced the "constant repetition and layering" of patterns of female helplessness and passivity to which Gilbert (1994) points. What role might literature play in helping children resist these patterns, in disrupting this layering, in offering alternative views of what makes Polly a "good girl" and Tommy a "good boy"? Certainly it is too much to expect literature alone to bear such a burden, but we can recognize that there are stories, such as the canonized patriarchal fairy tales, that contribute to such layering, reinforcing the notion that polarized gender roles are only natural and logical, ultimately drowning out or silencing the child's inner voice. Should children be "protected" from such stories? Given their ubiquity in the culture, that seems an unlikely—if not impossible—endeavor. But teachers can invite children to take a critical stance to patriarchal stories and the gender roles they prescribe. In the case of adolescent girls, Gilbert (1994) has pointed out that it is important to help them to "locate a space" from which they can critique and rewrite familiar but destructive cultural storylines. Although such critical reflection is not easily accomplished, it is evident that relation-

D. Taylor, *The Healing Power of Stories*

ships with new and varied texts—both literary and living—can act as key avenues for promoting the spaces girls need to construct their own authentic life stories (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 218; Taylor, 1996, p. 96). As Gilbert (1994) suggests, it is through a "comparison and juxtaposition" of multiple texts—of conflicting storylines—that young women are offered the possibility of seeing culturally dominant scripts from new perspectives.

P. Enciso, "Good/bad girls read together: pre-adolescent girls' co-authorship of feminine subject positions during a shared reading event"

Complicating this vital task, however, are the common restrictions of the official school world. Patricia Enciso (1998) reminds us that in many classrooms students are reluctant "to describe the worlds of reading that matter most to them" due to the fact that "power and social positions often determine who can and cannot speak about reading" (p. 46). For language arts teachers determined to resist and transcend limitations on students' development, it is clear that they must not only expand children's reading experiences beyond the patriarchal canon with its polarized gender roles, but they must also construct learning environments where it is safe for students to vicariously experience alternative ways of being in the world. Both Dyson (1998) and Brown and Gilligan (1992) cite teachers' power to create such an environment by modeling alternative storylines in their daily interactions and classroom instruction. In particular, Dyson (1998) emphasizes that it is teacher encouragement and support that can potentially awaken students to the knowledge that both as individuals and as communities, they have "the right to a different story" (p. 398). Drawing insight from Bakhtin (1981), she also notes that

> the social affiliations and divisions constructed, and revealed, by differentially shared stories can open up dialogic space for teachers and children. Within that space, the emerging official community—the classroom folk—can reflect on "given" stories, imagining other possibilities. (p. 393)

In such a community, it seems likely that young girls may continue to value their own inner voices rather than feeling that they must "go underground" with their objections and protests, losing their authentic voices, perhaps never to recover them. If the layering of patterns of female helplessness and passivity is to be disrupted through dialogic spaces that emerge from narrative, it would seem that stories such as "Tatterhood," "The Twelve Huntsmen," and "Three Strong Women" are appropriate places to begin.

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